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THE PARADOX OF MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISM

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Patriotism cannot be separated from religion without danger to both. The religion of Germany is a religion of authority. The religion of democracy must be the religion of the spirit and the truth. The war is freeing us from many an outgrown attitude of mind. Unless signs fail, not the least of its emancipations will be from the identification of merely destructive criticism with biblical science, for the democracy of the future will refuse to think its religion in the concepts of the autocracy it has destroyed. Mr. Wallis makes this plain. Only the truly scientific use of the Bible can make its revelation of God's will intelligent and dynamic in the new age now in the making.

Although German scholars have done a great deal to promote scientific investigation of Scripture, these scholars live under a government whose autocratic heresy laws make it impossible to popularize modern biblical knowledge in Germany. All German clergymen must base their preaching on strict orthodoxy. All German youths are given orthodox religious instruction by authorized teachers who represent the junker system of church and state. All German professors of biblical criticism are virtually put into a genteel quarantine. The so-called "academic freedom" enjoyed by these professors is freedom to disseminate their ideas to scholars. Germany has a false reputation for intellectual liberty, and this reputation should be quickly killed by the simple recital of plain facts. These facts ought to be mastered at once by all thoughtful persons in the allied countries and then advertised everywhere as part of the drive against Kaiserism.

Most of us are aware that the English-speaking nations encourage a greater

intellectual and religious liberty than does the German Empire. But not many of us have had the time or opportunity to examine this remarkable difference with care. The status of Bible-study in the Anglo-Saxon world contrasts very sharply with the narrow, hidebound paternalism which rules the subjects of the Kaiser. We have become quite familiar with the fact that Germany is politically subject to her master-class, but we have yet to realize the depth to which the virus of autocracy has penetrated the religious life of the German people.

Of course it will be asked at once, Have not the biblical scholars of Germany led the world? Have not American and British theological students by thousands gone across the water to sit at the feet of German professors? And are not the libraries of British and American divinity schools crammed with volumes of German critical scholarship? So simple and easy do the facts appear that the reactionaries and the millennial dawnists eagerly come forward

proclaiming that they have a clear case against all divinity schools in which criticism is recognized. They assure us that Germany invented criticism in order to make the Bible a scrap of paper and find an excuse for the war. Consequently all theological professors who have adopted critical methods and conclusions and who would now prove their patriotism should forthwith "hit the saw dust trail"!

This is the paradox of modern biblical scholarship. First Prussianism puts German higher critics in quarantine. Then Germany gets a camouflaged reputation for intellectual liberty. Then British and American theological schools import the books of German professors whose teachings the Kaiser will not allow in German churches. Then popular evangelists brand these theological seminaries as pro-German because they teach doctrines which no German pastor can recognize without losing his position.

The answer to the charges now being laid at the door of Anglo-Saxon biblical scholars is threefold: (1) Biblical criticism was not invented by Germans, but was imported into Germany from other countries. (2) After critical methods were adopted by German investigators the governmental authorities of that country took up a hostile attitude, putting restrictions on liberal professors of theology, forbidding popular propaganda of their views, and making it illegal for the German pulpit to base its ministry on the results of modern scholarship. (3) Biblical criticism is not an instrument of autocracy, as orthodox theorists now endeavor to make out, but on the contrary its tendency is to make plain the essential

democracy of the Bible, helping us to trace the channels through which God has entered the heart and mind of humanity, lifting the children of men gradually upward from barbarism into an ever more intelligent faith that the world is founded on divine laws of justice and righteousness. Those who raise an outcry against theological seminaries where scientific methods are followed, and seek to stampede the public mind with millennialism are holding back the progress of democracy and are doing exactly what the Kaiser wants them to do. Their attitude is Prussian.

Let us consider these points seriatim: First as to the claim that biblical criticism is an invention of the German intellect. The introductory proposition of modern biblical scholarship is that the Law of Moses, in its present form, originated at the end of Hebrew national history instead of at the *beginning*; and that the Law took its present form after the Babylonian exile, as a compilation from earlier documents, traditions, and primitive legal codes. But this view is not original to Germany. It was distinctly foreshadowed by a Spanish Jew, Ibn Ezra, the most eminent biblical scholar of the Middle Ages, far back in the twelfth century A.D. The idea was taken up by the English scholar Hobbes, in his book *Leviathan*, published in 1651; by the Frenchman La Peyrere, in his book *Pre-Adamites*, issued in 1655; and by the Jewish philosopher Spinoza, of Amsterdam, Holland, in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which came out in 1670. In the meanwhile the Frenchman Louis Cappellus in 1650 published his *Critica Sacra*, demonstrating the

imperfect and fallible condition of the Hebrew vowel points. In 1678, Richard Simon, another Frenchman, put forth a volume entitled *Critical History of the Old Testament*, showing that the Mosaic Law was compiled and edited centuries after the time of Moses. In 1753 appeared a work by Astruc, a French writer, identifying the so-called Jehovist and Elohist documents in Genesis. In 1800 was published the *Critical Remarks* of Alexander Geddes, a Scotchman, who denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. And although German scholars in the nineteenth century did more for biblical interpretation than did the scholars of other countries, they were matched in critical acumen during that period by Renan of France, Colenso of England, and Kuenen of Holland.¹

Having seen that biblical criticism did not originate in Germany, let us inquire more closely into its fortunes after being adopted in that country. The policy of the junker government was foreshadowed in the case of Professor Kant, of the Prussian University of Königsberg, in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and his *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* excited the alarm of the junkers and pietists. Kant was an admirer of the new American Republic, and when the French Revolution broke out the philosopher exclaimed, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen

thy salvation!" With these facts in mind it is highly instructive to read the letter of warning sent to the Königsberg professor by the reigning Hohenzollern:

1st Oct., 1794

Our gracious greeting first. Worthy and high-learned, dear liegeman, our highest Person has already since considerable time observed with much dissatisfaction how ye misuse your philosophy to disfigure and depreciate many head and foundation doctrines of the Holy Scripture and Christianity: which thing ye have especially done in your book *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* and likewise in other shorter treatises. We had expected better things of you; for ye must see yourself how little your action herein answers to your duty as teacher of youth, and to our paternal interests in the land, whereof ye are well aware. We desire at the earliest your most conscientious conformity, and expect of you, if ye would avoid our highest disfavor, that ye henceforth be found guilty of no such acts, but rather, as your duty bids, apply your influence and talents so that our paternal intention may be more and more attained: contrariwise, with continued obstinacy, ye have infallibly to expect unpleasant measures.

This letter, written in the name of the Prussian king, by the Prussian minister of education, is a monument of that German theological censorship which has continued until now, and which has developed along a line contrasting greatly with Anglo-Saxon policy. In Kant's reply he promised to say nothing more in public about religion

¹ For Ibn Ezra, see Professor G. F. Moore's introduction to Bacon's *Genesis of Genesis* (Hartford, 1891). On the general subject, S. I. Curtiss, *Sketches of Pentateuch Criticism* (Bibliotheca Sacra, Oberlin, 1884); Addis, *Documents of the Hexateuch* (London, 1892), preface; Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism* (London, 1893); Carpenter-Harford, *The Composition of the Hexateuch* (London, 1902), chap. iii; Duff, *History of Old Testament Criticism* (New York, 1910).

or the Bible. Another example is found in the case of Professor Martin Lebrecht de Wette, of the Prussian University of Berlin, in the first part of the nineteenth century. As Wellhausen says, De Wette was the first German "clearly to perceive and point out how disconnected are the alleged starting-point of Israel's history and that history itself." The able and brilliant De Wette was ejected from his biblical chair on a mere pretext, over the objection of the entire theological faculty at the University of Berlin, led by the celebrated Schleiermacher, who was himself in great danger of the same treatment.¹

Biblical scholarship in Germany today is an intellectual curiosity to which no German pastor can give public attention. The higher criticism in Germany is bottled up in professorial sanctums and lecture halls. The professors write books about it. They quarrel with each other over the details of it. And before the war they condescendingly delivered lectures to hopeful youths from England, Canada, Australia, the United States, and other countries, who labored under the delusion that there was more intellectual liberty in Germany than in other lands.²

The legal partnership of orthodoxy with junkerism has been especially hateful to German workingmen in the great industrial centers of the Empire. Ger-

man proletarians behold the aristocracy enthroned in the midst of a social system propped up for ages on church orthodoxy. The German ecclesiastical machine is prostituted to the will of the imperial government. The German socialist hates both God and the church because German religion is identified with aristocratic rule. Religion and the church, in the eyes of the German socialist, are a cloak for the robbery of the common people by the economic and political masters of Germany. The socialistic workingman therefore believes that he has a *moral reason* for hating the only God of whom he has ever heard. Is it any wonder then that the extreme forms of atheistic socialism, spreading over the world like some foul poison, should have originated in the industrial centers of the nation with which we are at war? Cause and effect along a number of lines now begin to stand out distinctly.

German orthodoxy draws a pre-emptory line of demarcation between the "holy" and the "worldly." God sits on high above the people, as an autocrat in the fashion of the Kaiser, passing down the divine law from heaven in the same way that the Kaiser passes down his decrees. Religion comes "from above." Hence the masses are bidden to "look up." Orthodoxy proclaims the duty of *submission*. Be obedient to the authorities, look for

¹ On Kant, see Überweg, *History of Philosophy* (New York, 1898, trans.), II, 140-42. The Hohenzollern letter is given in the book on Kant by Professor Wallace, of Oxford, published by Lippincott, Philadelphia. On De Wette, see Wellhausen, *History of Israel* (Edinburgh, 1885, trans.), pp. 4-5. Also, Cheyne, *op. cit.*, chap. iii.

² See "The New Prussian Heresy Law and Its Workings" in *American Journal of Theology*, XVI (April, 1912); and "Another Case of Discipline in the Prussian Church," *ibid.*, XVII (January, 1913).

your reward in the "other world," and in the meanwhile leave the affairs of *this* world to the government. The clergymen of modern Germany must live in the realm of traditional theology, repeating obsolete shibboleths and worn-out formulas, because orthodoxy fits the state of mind which the junkers desire to maintain among the masses.

But on the other hand the liberal professors of theology stand for an intellectual movement which, if given free rein by the authorities, would threaten the docility of the German people. Critical scholarship, in the eyes of the junker, would undermine the existing order of church and state. It is contrary to conventionality, and its advocates are therefore potential transgressors. But since Germany cannot afford to suppress its intellectuals *entirely*, the government has learned to handle the problem by putting its potential criminals on a pension and isolating them in an academic quarantine where they are out of real and vital connection with life. And to crown it all the Kaiser tickles the vanity of liberal professors by inviting them to visit him and talk about higher criticism! Great progress has been made since the days of De Wette and Kant. German autocracy has reduced bribery to a fine art. The *Herr Professor* belongs to a class which associates with royalty, and he is too dignified to impart his esoteric heresies to the common people. The trick is quite simple. Instead of shooting a heretic, you invite him to lunch!

Having seen how German biblical scholarship fares at the hands of German imperialism, we now inquire what becomes of the democracy which we

have attributed to higher criticism. Here we enter upon a new and still more fascinating aspect of our theme. The democracy of higher criticism thus far has been implicit rather than explicit. German scholars, expressing themselves in the respectable obscurity of polysyllabic jargon, declare that the orthodox idea of the Bible is *wrong*. They say that the biblical doctrine of God was not thrust autocratically into human life from an outside realm. But they are destructive rather than constructive. They fail to supply in the place of orthodoxy a clear-cut, well-rounded view of the Bible which can function spiritually in the life of the German people. And the reason why German scholarship has this limited, unvital character is because German autocracy limits these professors themselves in their contact with life. Placed in a cramped, artificial position, breathing the arid, poisoned atmosphere of imperialism, standing out of real and vital connection with the community, it is inevitable that they should misunderstand life. And hence they fail to interpret the Book of Life in a living way.

Although successful in vindicating certain concrete methods and results, German biblical scholarship has failed in the practical, reconstructive task that faces modern theologians. This is tragically evident in the almost cynical confession made by Professor Wellhausen a few years before the war. He declares that we cannot tell why the religious experience of the Hebrew nation has functional value and significance for the world at large, rather than the religious experience of any other ancient people. His words are: "We

cannot tell why Jehovah, of Israel, rather than Chemosh, the god of Moab, became the patron of righteousness and the Creator of the Universe."¹

More than thirty years prior to this declaration Wellhausen himself wrote the epoch-marking book *Geschichte Israels*, which gathered up the results of previous Old Testament criticism into a statement so clear and cogent that Bible-study everywhere took a new start. Wellhausen indeed has been the leading figure in biblical research during the last generation. His *Geschichte* was published in 1878, seven years after the founding of the present German Empire, and in the midst of the upheaval attending Bismark's promulgation of the "May Laws" against socialism. Wellhausen reverses the orthodox formula "The Law and the Prophets" so as to read, "The Prophets and the Law." In the critical restatement of Hebrew history the force which leads up to the adoption of the true religion is found in the work of Jehovah's prophets, who stand opposed to the *kings*, and who champion the cause of justice for the common people. Here surely is material for democracy! But what avails it for the German churches and the German people?

The prodigious effort needed to establish this view in the face of entrenched orthodoxy, the intellectual and spiritual revolution required for the vindication of critical methods and the official disfavor of a government hostile to every manifestation of liberalism and progressivism—all these considerations have resulted in slowing down the complex process of scriptural interpretation in

Germany, making it of no effect as a positive influence in the life of the Empire. German divinity professors themselves have taken the social standpoint of the aristocracy, have been satisfied to be let alone in the enjoyment of their stipends, and have been permitted to develop the minute analysis of biblical documents in cloistered isolation.

Turning away from the depressing spectacle of autocratic Germany, we are now prepared to glance at the Anglo-Saxon world. British churchmen have a legal and social status unknown to subjects of the Kaiser. Although there are legally established churches in Britain, as there are in Germany, the religion of Britain stands on a vastly freer basis than the religion of the Hohenzollerns. The constitution of the United States goes a step farther still, providing that the national government shall make no "establishment" of religion—similar measures being in effect in the state constitutions. The religious life of English-speaking communities marks a tremendous advance over the spiritual tyranny of the Kaiser. Thus in Britain it is legal for the clergy to speak in terms of modern biblical scholarship. A number of court decisions bearing on religious freedom were delivered by the English courts in the nineteenth century. The first and most remarkable of these decisions was given more than fifty years ago by the highest tribunal of the British Empire.

A number of Episcopal clergymen contributed separate articles to a volume which appeared in 1860 under the title *Essays and Reviews*, and which gave utterance to ideas at variance with

¹ "Israelitisch-jüdische Religion," in *Kultur der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1909), Teil, I, 15.

orthodoxy. The book is very moderate according to present standards of liberalism; but at the time of its appearance it seemed very dangerous in the eyes of many good people. One of the writers, a professor in Oxford University, said, "Interpret the Scripture like any other book. . . . This can only be done in the same careful and impartial way that we ascertain the meaning of Sophocles or of Plato. . . . Excessive system tends to create an impression that the meaning of Scripture is out of our reach, or is to be attained in some other way than by the exercise of manly sense and industry. . . . Let us not set out on our journey so heavily equipped that there is little chance of arriving at the end of it."

In a panic of wild alarm proceedings were instituted in the Arches Court of Canterbury by the high-church party, acting through the Bishop of Salisbury. One of the authors of the book was charged with denying the plenary inspiration of the Bible, and another was indicted for denying the doctrine of everlasting punishment. The court found these charges proved, and thereupon suspended the accused from the exercise of their official functions. But the defendants appealed to the Supreme Court, the "Crown in Council," which, in the year 1864, reversed the lower court. The overruling decision was written by Richard Baron Westbury, Lord High Chancellor. A facetious observer characterized this weighty judgment as "dismissing hell with costs, and

taking away from the orthodox members of the Church of England their last hope of eternal damnation."¹

Another landmark of spiritual freedom is furnished by the case of Bishop Colenso, who was sent to Africa as a missionary. In trying to convert a Zulu chief to Christianity, Colenso was greatly embarrassed by critical questions which the black man raised with regard to the stories in Genesis. The bishop had not paid much attention to the Scriptures up to that time, but stimulated by Zulu criticism, he now proceeded to investigate the Bible with a new interest, and in 1862 published a book entitled *The Pentateuch and Joshua Critically Examined*. (When mentioning biblical critics outside of Germany in the earlier part of this article we overlooked the Zulus.) Colenso's originality was acknowledged by continental scholars. In England his book produced results identical in character with those in the *Essays and Reviews* case. An attempt was made to convict the bishop, but he was triumphantly vindicated by the British courts.²

Religious liberalism was now seen to be inevitable. The publication of Wellhausen's book in 1878 accelerated the spread of the new views; and thenceforward the growth of critical opinion was very marked in Britain and the United States. The democracy of these nations, as compared with Germany, is shown in a very significant way by the outcome of several heresy trials during the eighties and nineties on both sides

¹ Nash, *Life of Richard Baron Westbury* (London, 1888), Vol. II, chap. iii. See also the *Quarterly Review*, April, 1864.

² See Cox, *Life of Colenso* (London, 1888); Kuenen, *The Hexateuch* (London, 1886), pp. xiv-xvii; Cheyne, *op cit.*, chap. ix.

of the Atlantic, which established in still greater degree the rights of intellectual and spiritual freedom. The foremost theological seminaries of the English-speaking world are now manned by faculties which, contrary to the German divinity schools, are preparing young men to base their ministry on the newer interpretation of the Bible. At the same time large numbers of mature clergymen who graduated under the old régime, are quietly adjusting themselves to the changing environment. As our church life, with irresistible momentum, swings away from the older orthodoxy to which the Kaiser's ecclesiastical machine remains anchored, the contrast between Germany and the Anglo-Saxon world is more and more sharp. The transformation which is now going forward represents a democratic triumph whose possibilities have not yet been fully realized. The educational process immediately ahead of us will be abridged by the shock of war.

During the time in which our churches have been permeated by modern biblical criticism they have also been stirred by the new social awakening. Here again Germany can show nothing like this movement which is now sweeping over the religious life of Britain and America. The "Forum" meetings, held in the United States under church auspices and giving a novel emphasis to the claims of democracy and justice, would be impossible under Prussianism. At first glance the social awakening seems to bear no relation to biblical scholarship. But as we study the deeper forces of history we begin to see that this movement is preparing us to understand the fundamental meaning of biblical criti-

cism. Various forces indeed are combining to make the new epoch.

It should now be clear that, while German *scholars* did more for Bible-study during the nineteenth century than did the scholars of other lands, the Anglo-Saxon *people* are today in a far better position than the people of Germany to grasp the meaning of the Bible as revealed by modern science, and to take the next great step in church progress. German religion is bound hand and foot in the toils of autocracy. But our churches move onward in the atmosphere of spiritual freedom.

For *democracy* is the ultimate meaning of the new biblical interpretation. The paradox of criticism arises from the conflict between aristocratic and democratic forces in the church life of modern civilization. The shock of the great war is preparing us to realize the logic of Christianity and the Bible. The whole drift of Hohenzollernism—and indeed of orthodoxy everywhere—is to obscure the tremendous fact that the Jewish and Christian churches were developed out of ancient heathenism through the powerful force of social movements based on justice and brotherhood. Amidst the terrible agony of a struggle for human rights, in a time when arrogant wealth bestrode the masses and mighty empires crushed out the liberties of small nations, the biblical faith in the one true and righteous God was born. Every church spire is a symbol of democracy and a threat against autocratic power. The church has grown up out of the struggle to make the world safe for government by the people.

It is this wonderful religious evolution, with God at the center of it, that modern biblical scholars are investigating. Hebrew history assumes ever growing reality as we discard the orthodox formula "The Law and the Prophets," and replace it by the critical formula "The Prophets and the Law." Opposing the kings and upholding the cause of justice for the common people, the prophets of Jehovah led forward to the final victory of monotheism over the heathen gods. The democracy of the Bible cannot be really understood by German critics who live in the poisoned atmosphere of tyranny. If they comprehended Scripture they would have to teach that the religion of Jesus and the prophets is against the system of junkerism; and their failure to do so proves that the usefulness of German biblical scholarship has come to an end.¹

What the awakening church needs is not orthodoxy but a *conservatism* which maintains all the religious values enshrined in the Scriptures. Orthodoxy is a human theory about the origin and nature of a religion which was established among men long before orthodoxy itself was ever heard of. Our Bible and our faith are calling for interpretation today in terms of the awful crisis through which the world is now passing. We must gird ourselves for a task which widens beyond anything hitherto at-

tempted by the church. We must explain the Bible in clear, honest words that can be understood by the people; and if the crasser supernaturalism of our fathers must go, it will be replaced by a deeper supernaturalism which finds God in the commonplace events of history, and in which the evolution of the world gives expression to the personality of the Most High. And while the church cannot formulate the political and economic program of democracy, it must become as a city set on a hill, the inspiration of social justice and the dynamic center of public righteousness.

The religious emotion and idealism of the people constitute a great fund of social strength which must and will be put behind the drive against Kaiserism and back of the movement to make the world a fit abode for mankind. These emotions were operative in the times of the prophets and Jesus Christ, the early church, the Reformation, the Puritan revolution, and the American Civil War. The time has now come when they must inevitably give direction and purpose to the currents of civic energy now being unloosed in such astounding measure. The Kaiser cannot afford to have the German people understand the Bible. But the world will move onward through the flames of war into the splendid franchise of the gospel.

¹ The democracy of criticism will be more apparent when it is generally realized that the struggle of the prophets against injustice was identical with the warfare against false gods, growing out of the development of Hebrew nationality at the point of assimilation between Israelite worshipers of Jehovah and Amorite worshipers of Baal. See article by the present writer in *Biblical World*, XLV (April, 1915), entitled "Amorite Influence in the Religion of the Bible."